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CASE STUDY #17



Pimachiowin-Aki World Heritage Site Initiative

Pikangikum First Nation in Ontario and the Pauingassi, Little Grand Rapids and Poplar River First Nations in Manitoba and the two provincial governments have established a partnership to pursue the goal of World Heritage Site designation on a boreal forest landscape encompassing First Nations traditional territories and provincial park lands. The Pimachiowin-Aki Corp. has been created to guide and administer the project.

Background

In 2002, Pikangikum, Poplar River, Pauingassi and Little Grand Rapids First Nations signed the Protected Areas and First Nation Stewardship Accord which committed them to a cooperative effort to protect and manage their traditional lands according to Anishinabe values and land management practices and to seek designation for a series of linked protected areas within their traditional territories as a World Heritage Site. The outstanding value of the area has also been recognized by the governments of Manitoba and Ontario through the creation of two large wilderness parks that straddle the provincial border in the same region. In December 2002 the two provinces and the four Accord First Nations submitted a joint proposal to Parks Canada for inclusion of this site on Canada's tentative list—a list of eleven sites that Canada would put forward to UNESCO for World Heritage Site designation over the next decade.



Drumming at close of Pimachiowin Aki Assembly meeting, June 2006
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“The agreement between the First Nations in whose traditional territory this site is located is precedent setting.”

The site was accepted in the final List, which was released in early 2004. About 43,000 square kilometres in size, the site includes Atikaki Provincial Park (398,130 ha) in Manitoba, Woodland Caribou Provincial Park (450,000 ha) in Ontario, the connecting Bloodvein Canadian Heritage River, and the traditional use areas of four First Nations. At the Boreal Zone Workshop in St. Petersburg, Russia, in October 2003 IUCN – The World Conservation Union concluded:

“This site is remarkable because of the existence of diverse and significant boreal forest values including woodland caribou and migratory bird populations in an ecologically intact cultural landscape. It fills an important gap by representing the Canadian boreal shield ecozone. This site is also internationally significant because of the planned integration of traditional and western ecological knowledge for land management and protection. The agreement between the First Nations in whose traditional territory this site is located is precedent setting.”

Initiative

Governments of Manitoba and Ontario have formally announced support and pledged to assist in the pursuit of a World Heritage Site for the area. In preparing a nomination for inscription on the World Heritage List, land management programs will be required which can demonstrate that the site is managed in a way that conserves its outstanding universal value.

Land use planning to determine community goals and interests is the foundation of the initiative. To date, Pikangikum and Poplar River First Nations have developed comprehensive, contemporary community land use plans which combine traditional ecological knowledge with western science. Pikangikum’s Land Use Strategy developed within the context of the Whitefeather Forest Planning Area integrates stewardship, customary activities and economic development. Poplar River has completed the Asatiwisipe Aki Lands Management Plan which reflects this First Nation’s goal to achieve permanent legal protection of its traditional territory. The two other First Nations partners are currently engaged in developing community land use plans and the provincial governments are completing management plans for Atikaki and Woodland Caribou parks.

In December 2006, the partnership established the Pimachiowin-Aki, a non-profit Corporation to guide and administer the initiative. Supported by Parks Canada and the International Institute for Sustainable Development, Pimachiowin-Aki Corp. has begun many of the preparatory steps to launch the development of a nomination document over the next several years.

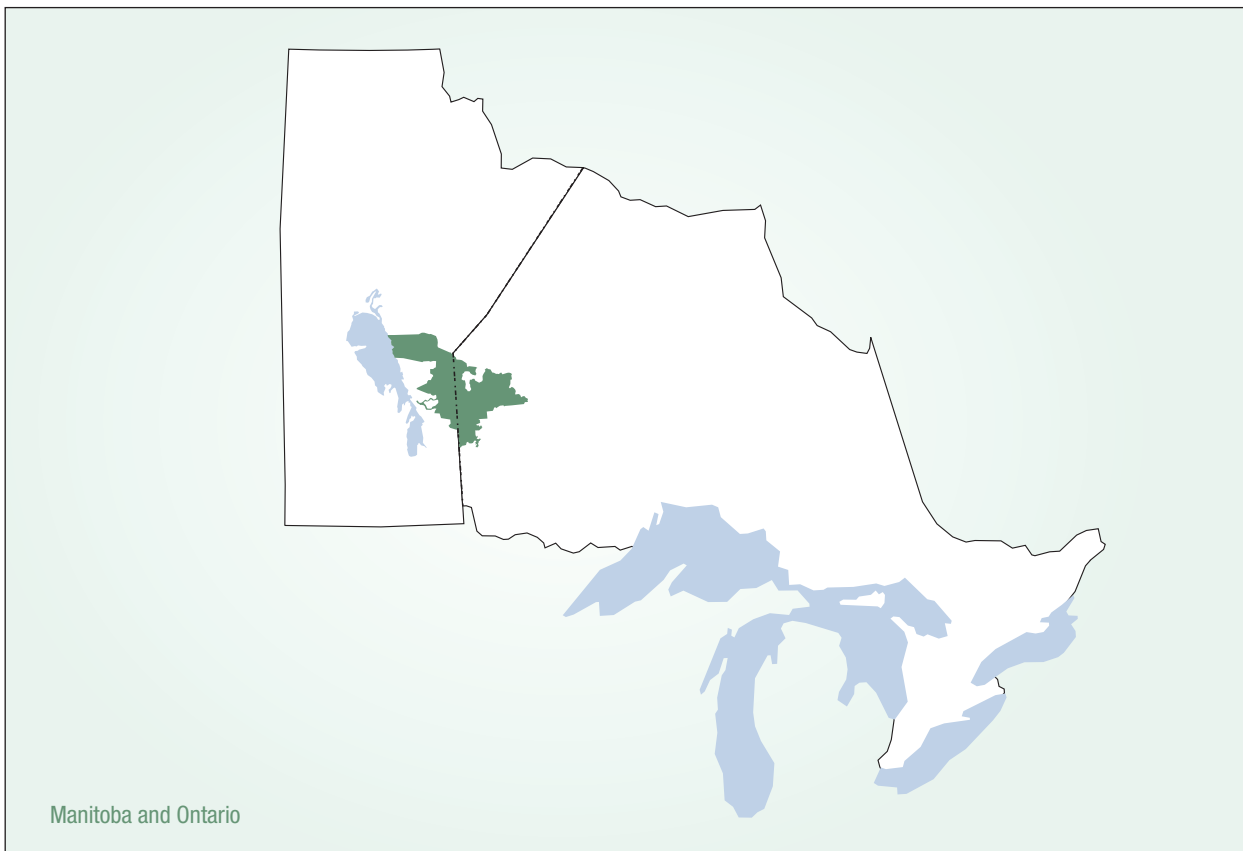


Lessons Learned

Among the lessons learners from the project to date are:

- First Nations' leadership and support has been critical to the establishment and evolution of the initiative, and has been the basis of positive and effective cooperation.
- First Nations' articulation of values and their vision of a desired future state of their traditional territories have been a powerful influence in land use decision-making.
- The integration of traditional ecological knowledge and western scientific information provides significant benefits through enhancement of the knowledge used to inform land use planning.
- Effective communications are essential to ensure accurate information is available to generate support.

Pimachiowin-Aki World Heritage Site Initiative



Conclusions

Partners remain committed to and excited about the potential of this initiative. The designation is expected to bring significant local, regional, national and international benefits. First Nations could experience new cultural tourism and eco-tourism opportunities and the protection of land and biodiversity for spiritual and physical health of communities and continuance of traditional life ways. The project provides the opportunity to

establish innovative cooperative approaches to land management. Designation would contribute to meeting Canada's and the provinces' obligations under the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity and, ultimately, it could safeguard a globally significant boreal forest ecosystem and the living cultural landscape it supports for the benefit of all humanity.

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Pimachiowin Aki Assembly meeting, June 2006, photo copyright Karan Aquino

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